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SUBJECT: BRAZIL CLAIMS AMAZON DESTRUCTION IS DECLINING

¶1. The rate of deforestation of the Amazon is slowing according to preliminary estimates announced by the Government of Brazil (GoB). According to the data from the Ministry of Environment (MMA), the country's deforestation rate has likely declined 11 % when compared to 2004-2005 figures. This will be the second consecutive deforestation rate drop under the administration of Environment Minister Marina Silva.

¶2. According to the MMA, in the period from August 2004 to August 2005 approximately 18,793 square km of the Amazon were deforested, a 31 % drop when compared to the same period a year before, the best result since 1997. GoB estimates show a probable 11 % drop in these numbers for the same period in the 2005-2006 figures. Mato Grosso is still the leading state in terms of deforestation, even though it presented a 34 % percent estimated reduction when compared to last year. Sao Felix do Xingu, a city in the state of Para, is the single largest municipal culprit in terms of deforestation. However, local government has already presented a plan to cut down deforestation in that state.

¶3. According to the Ministry current methodology, the deforestation area will lie around 16,700 square km this year. Mato Grosso is responsible for half of the devastated area. "We will have two consecutive years with a rate less than 20,000 square km, returning to levels of the mi-1990s", said Joao Paulo Capobianco, the MMA's secretary of biodiversity and forests. Brazil's highest rate of

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destruction took place in 1995, when over 28,000 square km were deforested. Nevertheless, the NGO Greenpeace has questioned the number arguing that they have a study that points out an 8.4% raise in deforestation rate.

¶4. Comment: It is evident that good work is being done by Minister Marina Silva's administration. Three main factors are responsible for this reduction: intensified monitoring of logging, stricter control and increased organization of land titling and tenure and the creation of 18 conservation units. Although a lot more needs to be done, if the figures prove correct, it will be the first time in over a decade that two consecutive decrease in deforestation rates have taken place. End Comment

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